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Michigan Professional **FIRE FIGHTERS UNION**

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Terrence H. Chesney
Secretary-Treasurer

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

My name is Mark Docherty; I am the President of the Michigan Professional Fire Fighters Union and a Sergeant with the Sterling Heights Fire Department.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf my organization and the over 5000 firefighters it represents. Our firefighters are serving on the front lines protecting 130 different communities throughout the state of Michigan.

I come before you today to express our opposition to HB 4309.

With the changes in our economy, there have been considerable discussions on the need to consolidate functions of local governments into Authorities. This creates efficiencies by reducing overhead and duplicated administrative functions.

While Consolidations or Authorities do not provide a large immediate cost savings, they do save money over the long run.

For example, if you were to consolidate 4 different fire departments into one fire authority, you would save the administrative costs for 3 of the departments. Authorities create these long term efficiencies while maintaining street level services. Each community now covered by the Authority still has the same area to cover, the same calls for service and still needs the same number of personnel to perform the services.

Our organization supports the concept of consolidation when done fairly and we encourage our members to be involved in the process. Additionally we have created an internal union committee of members from across the state to study the process and provide the resources our members need to assist them in that process.

There is a misconception though, that members from each bargaining group need to be paid the highest wage and the best benefits from each group. This is not true.

The statute currently states: **"An employee who is transferred to a position with the political subdivision shall not, by reason of the transfer, be placed in any worse position with respect to worker's compensation, pension, seniority, wages, sick leave, vacation, health and welfare insurance, or any other benefits that the employee enjoyed as an employee of the acquired system."**

Another concern expressed was that contracts from an acquired system would remain in effect indefinitely, never allowing the Authority to decrease any wages or benefits for employees of the Authority.

This also is not true.

Even though we believe the Act is clear, we wanted to address ALL of the concerns that seemed to be throwing up road blocks to consolidations. We worked with the Michigan Municipal League and Senate Republicans to craft 2 bills that clarified all of those issues. The bills were SB 1085 and 1086 from last session which were passed out of the Senate without any amendments.

SB 1085/1086 clarified that each employee did not have to be raised to the highest wage and benefits of each group. Each bargaining group would maintain their own contract until it expired. If one contract expired a year before the others then it would be extended one year until the other contracts also expired. After all contracts have expired, a new single contract would be negotiated with all employees in the authority as one bargaining group. At that point all wages and benefits would be subject to change.

We believe these bills addressed all of the concerns and still provided a fair system that encouraged all parties to move towards consolidation.

What HB 4309 does is completely strip away any wages, seniority, healthcare, pensions or any other benefits that the employees of the acquired groups have.

How does this bill encourage employees to participate in consolidation efforts, when it strips their benefits and seniority away?

This is not the time to throw up greater road blocks to a process that needs to be encouraged.

All this bill does is strip away the bargaining rights of the employees in an attempt to seek greater savings through massive reductions in wages and benefits without having to bargain those concessions. This was never the intent of consolidations or authorities.

We do not believe that collective bargaining is the cause of failed attempts to consolidate. I was involved in consolidation talks with the communities of Hazel Park, Madison Heights, Ferndale and Royal Oak. All four firefighter bargaining groups were able to come together and develop a plan for complete integration of seniority and ranks, station locations and staffing. All of which the communities at the table agreed with. The bargaining groups also were able to come to agreement on the wage structures and benefits to include pensions that they, as one group, would seek in the new contract. Our members had completed their part of the consolidation. What then happened was a complete breakdown from the management side of the consolidation. Like how much control would each community have in the authority, what would the charter say, what tax would be levied, who would be fire chief, what would the authority be called and so on. Collective Bargaining had nothing to do with the break down as is the case in most consolidation talks.

I urge you to not remove the collective bargaining rights of firefighters and not pass HB 4309. We would like to revisit the meaningful reforms that were placed in SB 1085/1086 last session. We believe this would completely address the concerns expressed above.

I want to thank the Chairman and the committee members for this opportunity to address the committee today.

And I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.